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The Daily 202

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Antitrust is all the rage. Monopolies and

mergers emerge as major issues in the Democratic primaries.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) speaks on Saturday afternoon at the Heartland Forum on the campus of Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa. (Nati Harnik/AP)

BY JAMES HOHMANN
with Joanie Greve and Mariana Alfaro

THE BIG IDEA:

STORM LAKE, Iowa — If the newest Democratic purity test sounds retro, it’s because it is.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) quotes William Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech as she channels the prairie populism that catapulted him to the Democratic nomination in 1896. “Like Bryan, I will fight for farmers,” she promises.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) calls for a modern-day Granger movement, the coalition of Midwestern farmers that formed after the Civil War to challenge hefty fees being charged by monopolistic railroads to transport their grain to market.

“Literally this movement started when farmers were out there with their pitchforks … and that's what we need to see today,” Klobuchar told hundreds of farmers during a forum here in rural northwestern Iowa on Saturday afternoon. “Our railroads … are down to four, the same number as on the Monopoly board. We are entering what is essentially a new Gilded Age, and we need to take on the power of these monopolies. We're getting to the point where you know you're not going to be able to get a fair deal.”

This riff drew the loudest cheers of the day during the Heartland Forum. Klobuchar was one of four Democratic presidential candidates, plus Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Ohio),

who fielded questions about issues facing rural America. About 150 farmers gathered for a separate rally earlier in the day to agitate for legislation that would put a moratorium on corporate mergers.

-- Warren went even further than Klobuchar as she called for breaking up Big Ag. She promised to try unwinding some megamergers that have already been approved if she's elected, including the $66 billion Bayer-Monsanto deal, which combined two major seed suppliers. Government statistics show four companies control 85 percent of the U.S. corn seed market, up from 60 percent in 2000, and 75 percent of soybean seeds, up from about 50 percent.

"Twenty years ago, 600 different outfits were selling seeds. Today, basically, it's six," Warren said. "A generation ago, 37 cents out of every food dollar went into a farmer's pocket. Today, it's 15 cents. And one of the principal reasons for that has been concentration in agribusiness. You've got these giant corporations that are making bigger and bigger profits for themselves, for their executives and for their investors, but they're putting the squeeze on family farms. We've got to start fighting back against them."

-- It's not just farmers who are suddenly fixated on corporate consolidations. This has quickly become one of the hottest topics on the campaign trail, surfacing in

conversations across the country. M&A is suddenly sexy off Wall Street and could play as prominent a role in 2020 as in any national election since 1912.

Trustbusting has become the cleanest proxy for Democratic presidential aspirants to demonstrate their seriousness about taking on corporate power. Democrats point to data that suggests we're living in an era of monopolies, monopsonies and oligopolies not seen since the Gilded Age. They blame consolidation for stagnant wages, higher prices, lower product quality, income inequality and a host of other systemic problems afflicting the middle class.

Agriculture is one of several large industries in which this year's bumper crop of Democratic candidates is calling for breaking up the biggest players or otherwise limiting their power, from technology and telecommunications to transportation, online travel, financial services, pharmaceuticals and, of course, health insurance companies. They all say that the Trump administration's most notable move in the antitrust space, unsuccessfully opposing the AT&T-Time Warner merger, was more about trying to punish CNN for its coverage of the White House than actually trying to limit corporate power.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) speaks at a campaign rally in Los Angeles's Grand Park on March 23. (Mario Tama/Getty Images)

-- Breaking up the big banks is a well-known pillar of Bernie Sanders's stump speech, but even when he's speaking to urban audiences, the senator from Vermont still takes time to decry the Bayer-Monsanto merger as bad for farmers and consumers. Sanders wasn't in Iowa this weekend, but he wrote an op-ed for Saturday's Des Moines Register promising to

strengthen antitrust laws.

“When we are in the White House, we will reverse the Trump administration’s elimination of President Obama’s rule to let small farmers take legal action when they are abused by big corporate middlemen,” Sanders wrote. “The same goes for Trump’s elimination of the agency inside the USDA that enforces antitrust laws in the meatpacking industry. … We must end the absurd situation where the top four packing companies now control more than 80 percent of the beef market, 63 percent of the pork market, and 53 percent of the chicken market. We must help communities where there is a single buyer, meaning farmers are at the mercy of a corporation that’s effectively forcing them to use only the company’s feed and livestock.”

Bernie’s lifelong political hero has been Eugene Debs, an Indiana union leader who spent six months behind bars in 1894 for organizing a strike that a conservative federal judge ruled was illegal. Pullman, a rail car manufacturer that essentially had a monopoly on production, slashed wages by 25 percent but refused to cut rents for workers living in houses in the company town outside Chicago. When Pullman employees went on strike, Debs announced that members of his railworker union would refuse to do any work on Pullman coaches. This show of solidarity paralyzed the nation’s transportation network. Debs’s approach to organizing

indelibly shaped the senator's worldview, as I documented in a January 2016 Big Idea. (Klobuchar also mentioned the Pullman strike during Saturday's forum.)

-- History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes. There are eerie, and undeniable, parallels between the Gilded Age and the present moment.

Bryan, known as the Boy Orator of the Platte, represented neighboring Nebraska in Congress. He advocated unsuccessfully for bimetallism, which would have created inflation that helped farmers at the expense of eastern moneyed elites. Warren, an expert on bankruptcy as a Harvard Law professor and the bane of big banks as the architect of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, is an Oklahoma native who similarly peppers her erudite speeches with folky aphorisms.

Fran Karr points out the location of her flooded home on Friday to Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) in the recently flooded town of Pacific Junction, Iowa, on Friday. Jason Karr, Fran's husband, is behind them. (Nati Harnik/AP)

-- Klobuchar is writing a full-length book on antitrust policy that she expects will come out in the next six months to a year, likely before the Iowa caucuses. “It’s almost done,” she said in a half-hour interview after the forum here. “I think it does help that a number of candidates are talking about it. Otherwise I'd be out there by myself.”

Speaking to the crowd, Klobuchar touted her role as the top Democrat on the Senate subcommittee that oversees antitrust and competition policy. She says it was mergers in the pharmaceuticals industry, which led to price hikes for insulin, that prompted her to realize we've entered a new Gilded Age. "They have two lobbyists for every member of Congress, and nothing happens – including antitrust," she said of Big Pharma. "You know the first state that had a comprehensive antitrust law? It was Iowa. Iowa did it in 1888, and now we know we have to do it on the federal level and improve some of the laws that we have now."

-- Sen. Cory Booker (N.J.), one of the three other Democrats who sit on the antitrust subcommittee, was one of the leading critics of Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods and has sponsored far-reaching legislation to restrict mergers and acquisitions in the farming and food sectors. (The Washington Post is owned by Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos.) **Booker's bill, which was dead on arrival in a Republican-controlled Senate, was modeled on a proposal introduced 20 years ago by the late senator Paul Wellstone**, the Minnesota populist folk hero who died in a 2002 plane crash.

"A small number of giant companies control every link of our food chain," Booker said in a statement. (He skipped

the Iowa cattle call to attend fundraisers before the first-quarter deadline.) “Consolidation has now reached a point where the top four firms in almost every sector of the food and agriculture economy have acquired abusive levels of market power. As a result, the U.S. is losing farmers at an alarming rate, agricultural jobs and wages are drying up and rural communities are disappearing.”

-- Former housing and urban development secretary Julián Castro said that “Sen. Warren has been fantastic on this” when asked whether he’d block more mergers during the Storm Lake event. “When we analyze antitrust, we have to think more about not just prices for consumers but all the people along the production chain,” Castro said at the event.

-- Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) has endorsed Warren’s proposal to break up Facebook, Google and Amazon. She plans to introduce a bill in the House that would do so.

-- The rising tide of populism is already having some impact. Tech giants are panicked about what the next administration will do to them. They’re trying to avoid the pitchforks by asking to be regulated, understanding that it will probably be easier to water down both the rules and the enforcement, thanks to their armies of lobbyists, if they have seats at the table. And big companies with savvy strategists understand that they can actually shape

regulations in ways that create compliance costs and erect barriers to entry for entrepreneurs looking to challenge them. There's a long history of this, and Mark Zuckerberg's op-ed in Sunday's Post reads like a classic of the genre.

-- Even former congressman John Delaney (Md.), perhaps the biggest corporatist in the field of 15 Democratic candidates, called for updating antitrust laws on Saturday. At the forum, he declined to discuss breaking up specific companies but agreed that the growing number of mergers poses problems to society. "All the big companies have effectively controlled the part of the agricultural market where there's no risk, and they leave the farmers in the one part of the market where there's risk," he said.

O’Rourke holds first 2020 campaign rally in El Paso

-- Beto O'Rourke wasn’t in Iowa on Saturday because he was holding a big rally in his hometown of El Paso. But he used that kickoff speech to promise that combating the concentration of wealth and power will be a centerpiece of his campaign. “This extraordinary, unprecedented concentration of wealth and power and privilege must be broken apart, and opportunity must be shared with all,” O’Rourke declared.

-- Assuming Joe Biden still forges ahead with his plans to run for president after another rough week – from tone-deaf comments on Anita Hill to fresh scrutiny of his erratic record on abortion rights and topped off by Lucy Flores's allegations of unwanted touching – this issue will likely emerge as another liability on his left flank. The Obama administration had a spotty record on antitrust enforcement, something Klobuchar, Warren and Sanders each allude to when discussing this issue, and Obama White House officials were buddy-buddy with the big tech titans who have now become villains in the eyes of many Democratic activists. As a senator from Delaware, Biden was not just an ally of big business, Wall Street and credit card companies. Going back to the 1970s, he actually fought against strengthening antitrust laws.

-- Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) is also viewed by rival campaigns as vulnerable on this issue. It's not just that she hasn't led on antitrust. She hasn't even staked out a position. Columbia University law professor Tim Wu, the author of "The Curse of Bigness: Antitrust in the New Gilded Age," says Harris is "the largest question mark" among the major candidates. "She has been silent on the questions raised by tech monopolies," Wu warned in a recent op-ed for the New York Times. "Ms. Harris attracted some attention last month when she declined to register opposition to the proposed merger of the wireless carriers Sprint and T-Mobile — in stark contrast to the

rest of the senators running for president. It may be that she is relatively open to approving mergers; it is also possible that her positions are just undeveloped.”

A Harris spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Amy Klobuchar attends a meet-and-greet in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. (Charlie Neibergall/AP)

-- Klobuchar told me that the growing competition

among Democrats to toughen antitrust laws and enforcement reminds her of the 1912 election. “It was a Republican president, Teddy Roosevelt, that pushed antitrust,” she said. TR was incensed that his successor as president, William Howard Taft, wasn’t pursuing his agenda, especially trustbusting. So he challenged Taft for the GOP nomination. After losing at the convention, he created the new Bull Moose Party to run as an independent and decry growing corporate power. Woodrow Wilson sought to pick off Roosevelt’s progressive supporters by co-opting one of his core issues. “Wilson actually had a campaign song about antitrust,” said Klobuchar. “You can look it up.” Wilson won the three-way race. During his first term, he signed the Clayton Antitrust Act and created the Federal Trade Commission.

-- Warren, Klobuchar and Booker all suggest that their ultimate goal on antitrust is to save capitalism for future generations by limiting its excesses and maximizing competition in the marketplace. This sets them apart from someone like Sanders, who advocates for democratic socialism.

Bob Leonard, the news director for the Iowa radio stations KNIA and KRLS, asked Klobuchar about vertical integration. “In mid-2018, Walmart began bottling milk in a newly built facility near Fort Wayne, Indiana, for its 500 stores in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio,

Kentucky and Indiana," he lamented, citing a recent story from an agricultural trade publication. "With this, Walmart has Walmart-contracted truckers, hauling Walmart-contracted milk to a Walmart bottling plant that Walmart will then process and haul to Walmart stores on Walmart trucks to sell directly to Walmart customers. Costco is doing the same for chickens. Milk and chickens are loss leaders for these chains. … What specifically will you do to address this?"

Klobuchar said meaningful action will require changing the laws because the confirmations of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh mean that the Supreme Court will likely be hostile to antitrust efforts for at least a generation. In the meantime, she said, it's important to put as much money into enforcement as possible. "Think about the AT&T breakup. That took years to get done. But what happened? We saw significant lowering of our long-distance rates," Klobuchar said. "You have to be willing to put the resources into it. We now have several trillion-dollar companies. So you have to have people that are as sophisticated as those corporate tycoons to be able to take this on. You can't just think you're going to be able to do it with three lawyers in a room."

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WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING:

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) listens to testimony during a hearing last week. (Joshua Roberts/Reuters)

-- The House Judiciary Committee plans to vote Wednesday to authorize subpoenas to obtain the full report of special counsel Bob Mueller. John Wagner reports: “Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, on Monday announced plans for the panel’s vote, which would take place a day after a deadline the committee set for Attorney General

William P. Barr to share the report. Barr pledged last week to release a redacted version by mid-April, well after Nadler's deadline. Nadler's committee is seeking to obtain the 'full and complete report,' which spans nearly 400 pages, as well as underlying evidence."

What is a security clearance? And how could one lose it?

-- A White House whistleblower told lawmakers that more than two dozen denials for security clearances have been overturned during the Trump administration, calling Congress her "last hope" for

addressing what she considers improper conduct that has left the nation's secrets exposed. Rachael Bade reports: "Tricia Newbold, a longtime White House security adviser, told the House Oversight and Reform Committee that she and her colleagues issued 'dozens' of denials for security clearance applications that were later approved despite their concerns about blackmail, foreign influence, or other red flags, according to panel documents released Monday. Newbold, an 18-year veteran of the security clearance process who has served under both Republican and Democratic presidents, said she warned her superiors that clearances 'were not always adjudicated in the best interest of national security' — and was retaliated against for doing so."

"I would not be doing a service to myself, my country, or my children if I sat back knowing that the issues that we have could impact national security," Newbold told the committee.

Nipsey Hussle attends the Grammy Awards on Feb. 10 in Los Angeles. (David Crotty/Patrick McMullan/Getty Images)

GET SMART FAST:

1. **Rapper Nipsey Hussle was killed in a shooting outside his South Los Angeles clothing store.** Two others were injured in the attack against the musician, who was nominated for best rap album at this year's Grammy Awards for his debut album, "Victory Lap." (Allyson Chiu)
2. **A college student in Columbia, S.C., was found dead hours after she got into a car she thought was her Uber.** Samantha Josephson's body was discovered by hunters 12 hours after witnesses saw her boarding the car. A suspect has been arrested. (Katie Mettler)
3. **Michigan State knocked Duke out of March Madness.** The Spartans beat the Blue Devils 68-67 and will face Texas Tech in the Final Four, while Virginia will face Auburn. (Roman Stubbs and Des Bieler)
4. **Tensions are rising between U.S. and Ethiopian authorities conducting a probe into the Boeing 737 Max 8 crash.** Officials are clashing over access to data and its interpretation as both nations work to piece together what happened March 10. (Wall Street Journal)

5. **While speaking to reporters, Pope Francis said it was “important” that a French cardinal convicted of covering up abuse be presumed innocent as he appeals his case.** Philippe Barbarin, one of France’s leading Catholic figures, stepped away from his post for an unspecified amount of time after Francis didn’t accept his resignation. (Chico Harlan)
6. **A Maryland statute making it easier for adults who say they were sexually abused as children to sue institutions harboring alleged predators may have also irreversibly granted some immunity to the Catholic Church.** A provision lobbied for by the church tucked into a 2017 law now stands in the way of Maryland joining a nationwide effort to bring justice to victims over age 38. (Erin Cox and Justin Wm. Moyer)
7. **A memorial to honor Native American veterans will open next year on the Mall in Washington.** The $15 million “Warriors’ Circle of Honor” will stand outside the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. (Dana Hedgpeth)
8. **Japan said the name of its new imperial era will be “Reiwa,” which means order and harmony.** The new era will start May 1, after the current era, Heisei, which will end with Emperor Akihito’s abdication. (BBC)
9. **New York will become the first American city to implement congestion pricing.** The new tolls,

partnered with higher real estate taxes and the collection of more sales tax from online purchases, are meant to help raise $25 billion to improve the city's public transit system. (Wall Street Journal)

Politicians react to Trump's border threat and aid cut

IMMIGRATION WARS:

-- The White House doubled down on Trump's threat to close the border with Mexico in response to the tide of migrants trying to reach the U.S., despite

warnings that doing so would cripple the American economy and hurt consumers. David J. Lynch, Maria Sacchetti and Joel Achenbach report: "Sealing the border with Mexico, America's third-largest trading partner, would disrupt supply chains for major U.S. automakers, trigger swift price increases for grocery shoppers and invite lawsuits against the federal government, according to trade specialists and business executives. … Two of the president's most senior aides nonetheless defended the move on the Sunday news shows. Acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said on ABC News's 'This Week' that it would take 'something dramatic' to persuade the president to abandon his border-closing plans. And Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway insisted on 'Fox News Sunday' that the president's threat 'certainly isn't a bluff.' …

"**Administration officials have offered no details about the president's intentions, and border control officials have received no instructions to prepare for a shutdown**, according to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection official. … Mexican officials have tried to avoid inflaming the situation, offering no public comment since Friday, when President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said: 'We are going to help, to collaborate. We want to have a good relationship with the government of the United States. We are not going to argue about these issues.'"

-- Mulvaney also defended Trump's order to cut off $500 million in U.S. assistance to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, including programs meant to curb poverty and violence in the three Central American nations. Mary Beth Sheridan and Kevin Sieff report: "One former U.S. official said there was 'chaos' in the State Department and U.S. embassies as officials tried to figure out whether they had to cancel existing contracts or simply not renew them. … Democratic officials, aid groups and former officials said Trump's action could boomerang by shrinking or eliminating some of the very programs keeping would-be migrants in Central America. 'Ironically, our goals of having people stay and thrive in El Salvador are very similar to the current administration's,' said Ken Baker, chief executive of Glasswing International, which runs education, health and entrepreneurship programs in El Salvador and receives funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development."

-- Democrats are fuming over Trump's decision to cut aid to the three Northern Triangle countries. Politico's Ted Hesson reports: "Rep. Joaquín Castro (D-Texas), chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, called the move 'short-sighted and flawed,' and cautioned that it could inflame what he called a humanitarian crisis at the border. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said it was 'foreign policy by tweet' and demonstrated Trump's ignorance of

the funds' purpose. … Leahy's office, which takes a lead role overseeing the funding, has directed the State Department to provide a detailed explanation of what it plans to cut and whether there will be exceptions."

-- Pope Francis issued another public rebuke of Trump, telling reporters aboard the papal plane that leaders who close borders "will become prisoners of the walls that they build." Francis also criticized the Spanish government's decision to keep out migrants from Morocco, saying it's cruel to use barbed wire to stop people from reaching the country. (New York Times)

Joe Biden speaks to the International Association of Fire Fighters last month in Washington. (Andrew Harnik/AP)

MORE ON 2020:

-- Joe Biden defended himself in a Sunday morning statement after a Nevada Democrat accused him of unwanted touching and kissing in 2014, saying he doesn't believe he behaved inappropriately. Felicia Sonmez reports: "Lucy Flores, a former assemblywoman who was Nevada's 2014 Democratic nominee for

lieutenant governor, said ... Biden touched and kissed her without her consent before a rally to support her campaign. She said the experience mortified, embarrassed and confused her." Biden responded by saying that, during his years in public life, he has offered "countless handshakes, hugs, expressions of affection, support and comfort … and not once — never — did I believe I acted inappropriately. … If it is suggested I did so, I will listen respectfully. But it was never my intention."

In response to Biden's statement, Flores said that she is glad he is "willing to listen" but that she finds it concerning the former vice president doesn't think he has ever acted inappropriately: "Frankly, I think that's a little bit of a disconnect … Of course I want him to change his behavior, and I want him to acknowledge that it was wrong," Flores told CNN.

-- Flores's accusation has brought increased scrutiny to Biden's affectionate and sometimes physical style with women. Elise Viebeck, Colby Itkowitz, Michael Scherer and Matt Viser report: "In some of the photos, Joe Biden is behind the women, his hands on their shoulders, as he whispers in their ears. He embraces Hillary Clinton, his hands around her torso. He kisses a young girl's head, his fingers framing her face, as she looks blankly toward the camera. … Though photos attesting to this behavior abound on the Internet, they were often framed in past news accounts as harmless

and sometimes entertaining — a sign of ‘Biden being Biden.’ …

“Some people close to Biden acknowledge that he has a long history of being affectionate. … During a 2015 news conference at the White House, the vice president was photographed standing close behind Stephanie Carter, the wife of incoming Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter, while holding her shoulders and whispering in her ear. The moment received significant attention online. Stephanie Carter, in a blog post on Medium published Sunday night, said she was grateful for Biden’s gesture, describing the moment as ‘a close friend helping someone get through a big day.’ … Defenders have argued that Biden’s intentions are innocent, even when his behavior seems problematic. On Saturday, women who previously worked for Biden began to circulate testimonials defending his character and personal conduct, an effort meant to rebut Flores’s accusations.”

-- Many Democrats feature botched Spanish translations on their official campaign websites. Politico's Jesus Rodriguez reports: “They’re posting passages in Spanish on their websites that bear striking similarities to the output from Google’s translation service, appearing to perform only minor cleanup before publishing the copy on their sites. While Google Translate can serve as a workable starting point, more often than

not it needs a human hand to produce Spanish that would pass muster with a native speaker."

-- When Kamala Harris arrived in D.C. as a senator from California, she sponsored a bill that urged states to eliminate cash bail, a position that became central to her criminal justice reform platform. The move, however, surprised many back home, because she was absent on the issue for the 13 years she served as district attorney and attorney general. The AP's Juliet Linderman and Tami Abdollah report: "'For her entire career she used some of the highest money bail amounts to keep people in jail cells and saddle poor families with financial debt,' said Alec Karakatsanis, an attorney who has brought several legal challenges to California's bail system, 'and as soon as she had no influence on that issue practically, she announces she has a different view on it.' … Observers of her career note some of her key positions, like her opposition to cash bail, came at politically opportune moments, after public views had shifted on race, inequality and bias in the justice system."

-- Elizabeth Warren lost her campaign finance director, Michael Pratt, after she eschewed holding high-dollar fundraisers. The New York Times's Astead Herndon and Jonathan Martin report: "Ms. Warren's early troubles reflect the broader challenges confronting the vast Democratic field, all vying for money and attention

as they seek to dethrone President Trump. Harvesting online donations does not come easily to noncelebrity candidates, and the party's longstanding fascination with youthful charisma — along with its current, Trump-driven fixation on electability — can outweigh qualities like experience or policy expertise. … At a Valentine's Day meeting at Ms. Warren's Washington condominium ... Pratt noted that campaigns often collapse when they run out of money and pleaded with her not to cut off a significant cash stream … But Mr. Pratt lost the argument to two of Ms. Warren's closest advisers, Dan Geldon and Joe Rospars, who made the case about standing apart from the field and freeing up her schedule."

-- The first quarter for fundraising ended at midnight, which means that over the next two weeks we'll learn how much money the presidential candidates have raised.

--Right out of the gate, Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Ind., announced this morning that he raised more than $7 million in the first three months of the year.

-- To avert a primary, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) kicked off his reelection campaign on Saturday by playing up his loyalty to the president at an event featuring Vice President Pence. Robert Costa reports: "Democrats scored a victory in November in South

Carolina's 1st Congressional District — a district won by Trump by more than 13 points in 2016. … By enlisting Pence for his campaign's launch — and promising his supporters this weekend that Trump will come to stump for him later this year — Graham is aiming to scare off any potential rivals."

-- Chicago is preparing for a runoff tomorrow to decide whether Toni Preckwinkle or Lori Lightfoot will be the first black woman to be its mayor. The Chicago Tribune's Bill Ruthhart, Gregory Pratt and Juan Perez Jr. report: "Preckwinkle spent almost her entire weekend encouraging voters in the predominantly black South and West sides to head to the polls. She also made visits to Little Village and Humboldt Park, heavily Latino neighborhoods. Her schedule showed no visits to the city's predominantly white wards. … Lightfoot, a former partner at law firm Mayer Brown, stressed it's time to finally crush the Chicago machine and usher change into City Hall. Preckwinkle emphasized Chicagoans are best off electing an experienced leader, because mayor is a difficult position that faces tough challenges."

Ukrainian actor Volodymyr Zelensky casts his ballot at a polling station in Kiev on Sunday. (Genya Savilov/AFP)

THE NEW WORLD ORDER:

-- Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian and actor, came out ahead in the first round of the Ukrainian presidential election. David L. Stern and Anton Troianovski report: “Zelensky led the large field with close to one-third of the vote, according to an exit poll from a consortium of polling organizations. President Petro

Poroshenko was in second place. Former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko was close behind, and it appeared that she and Poroshenko would be vying for runner-up as results came in. … Zelensky's strong showing reflected widespread disappointment over what many see as a lack of tangible change in the country after a pro-Western revolution five years ago. If he wins the runoff, the untested Zelensky will face challenges ranging from navigating economic doldrums to negotiating with Russian President Vladimir Putin."

-- In Slovakia, meanwhile, liberal environmentalist and political newcomer Zuzana Caputova was elected as the nation's first female president. From the Associated Press: "Caputova had 58 percent of the vote ... in Saturday's runoff election, topping European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic. … Caputova, 45, has little experience in politics and attracted voters who are appalled by corruption and mainstream politics. She only recently became vice chairman of the Progressive Slovakia, a party so new it has not had a chance to run in parliamentary elections. Caputova resigned from her party post after winning the first round of the presidential vote two weeks ago. … A lawyer by profession, Caputova became known for leading a successful fight against a toxic waste dump in her hometown of Pezinok. ... A divorced mother of two, she is in favor of gay rights and opposes a ban on abortion in this conservative Roman Catholic country."

-- Afghan Vice President Abdurrashid Dostum survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban amid peace negotiations between the group and the U.S. Sharif Hassan, Sayed Salahuddin and Amie Ferris-Rotman report: "Dostum, a controversial figure who has been accused by political rivals of rape and torture, had gone to Balkh province to evaluate the security situation and consult his followers on the delicate peace process, from which the Afghan government has been excluded. Six of Dostum's bodyguards were injured in the attack, which continued into his native Jowzjan province, local official Ana Murad Shahi said."

-- A deadly chemical disaster in China's Xiangshui county has residents questioning whether the rapid industrial growth in the area has instead condemned it. Gerry Shih reports: "Over the past two decades, local officials have transformed this once-overlooked coastal expanse of wheat and rice farms into one of China's major chemical-production centers, tripling the region's economic output in the process. … The toll, locals say, has been polluted rivers, toxic soil, four major explosions in 12 years and a litany of smaller accidents that turned the terrifying into the routine. "

-- A Vietnamese woman who is the sole remaining suspect in custody over the killing of Kim Jong Un's half brother Kim Jong Nam pleaded guilty to a lesser

charge and will probably be released next month. Shibani Mahtani reports: “Doan Thi Huong, 30, is one of the two foreign women who were accused of the murder of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s elder brother. The two were allegedly responsible for delivering the potent VX nerve agent that killed the North Korean in an airport terminal in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February 2017. … The judge presiding over the case, Azmi Ariffin, said the brief period of imprisonment and the lesser charge would ‘serve the interest of justice.’ He urged Huong to consider herself lucky for escaping a murder charge, which carries a mandatory death sentence in Malaysia.”

-- In a post published in the Daily Beast, Gavin De Becker, a security consultant for Amazon founder and chief executive Jeff Bezos, said his team of investigators found that Saudi Arabia accessed Bezos’s phone. Bezos, who owns The Washington Post, launched an investigation into the National Enquirer after the publication revealed a relationship between him and former TV presenter Lauren Sanchez: “Our investigators and several experts concluded with high confidence that the Saudis had access to Bezos’ phone, and gained private information. As of today, it is unclear to what degree, if any, AMI was aware of the details. … Experts with whom we consulted ... confirmed that hacking was a key part of the Saudis’ ‘extensive surveillance efforts that ultimately led to the killing of [Washington Post contributing columnist] Jamal Khashoggi. … In October,

the Saudi government unleashed its cyberarmy on Bezos (and later me). Their multi-pronged campaign included public calls for boycotts against Amazon.com and its Saudi subsidiary, Souq.com."

-- Columbia University President Lee Bollinger has an op-ed in our paper today outlining legal avenues the U.S. government could use to go after Khashoggi's killers.

-- By recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, Trump pushed his Arab allies into a corner, jeopardizing his chances of pulling off what he once called the "deal of the century." Bloomberg News's Glen Carey reports: "Saudi Arabia and Egypt are unlikely to throw their weight behind the proposal being drawn up by Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and adviser, and White House Middle East peace negotiator Jason Greenblatt, according to interviews with key diplomats and analysts in Washington. One diplomat described the initiative, which has yet to be made public, 'hocus pocus' and doubted whether Trump -- who has raised questions about whether he supports a Palestinian state -- cares about a negotiated settlement."

-- Many American political consultants with ties to Trump are taking their talents to African campaigns and seizing on the region's turn toward democracy. The New York Times's Dionne Searcey

reports: “As elections become more common and competitive — complete with polling and social media campaigns — African candidates are hiring Western firms to sway voters and influence the media coverage of their candidacies. Consultants with perceived ties to Mr. Trump are especially valued by their political clients, even in countries that he disparaged with a vulgar phrase, and which are largely off his administration’s foreign policy radar. … Some Western firms are trying to exploit the Trump administration’s concerns that China is surpassing America’s influence on the continent, and are marketing their African clients as solutions.”

-- The Russian military is also making inroads in Africa. The Times’s Eric Schmitt reports: “Russia has been steadily expanding its military influence across Africa, alarming Western officials with increasing arms sales, security agreements and training programs for unstable countries or autocratic leaders. … Russia, entrenched in Africa during the Cold War’s violent East-West rivalry, largely retreated from the continent after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But in the past two years, Moscow has rekindled relations with Soviet-era clients like Mozambique and Angola, and forged new ties with other countries. [Putin] will host a summit meeting between Moscow and African countries later this year.”

-- Once again, “fake news” runs wild on WhatsApp as India’s elections approach. The Wall Street Journal’s

Newley Purnell reports: “India’s political parties often employ WhatsApp to blast tailored political messages to tens of thousands of WhatsApp groups they have created. The groups are often organized by caste, income level and religion, said Shivam Shankar Singh, a University of Michigan graduate who worked as a data consultant for the country’s ruling party. He resigned last year, citing the party’s spreading of fake news as a reason. ‘India is now the world’s cheapest country to spread fake news,’ said Counterpoint analyst Tarun Pathak. Many of the new users getting online are in rural areas, with limited digital literacy, and are using mobile phones that cost as little as $20, he said. Among the WhatsApp messages that have taken off in recent weeks is footage from a videogame falsely purporting to show Indian warplanes blowing up a building across rival Pakistan’s border.”

Pro-Brexit leave the European Union supporters attend a rally in Parliament Square after the final leg of the "March to Leave" in London, Friday, March 29, 2019. (Tim Ireland/AP)

BREXIT WATCH:

-- Britain will leave the European Union in 11 days without a deal unless something changes this week. Prime Minister Theresa May is reportedly planning on holding a fourth vote on her exit deal, but many government officials already have mixed faith in it.

(CNN)

- Chief Secretary to the Treasury Elizabeth Truss said that while she believes May's deal is the best option for Britain, she also "doesn't have any fear" of leaving the E.U. without a deal.
- Ireland's deputy premier, Simon Coveney, urged businesses in the country to "be preparing for the potential impact of No-Deal." "Don't ignore this possibility," he tweeted, "there's a lot of help, funding & advice available, access it and be informed!"
- Conservative Party Chief Whip Julian Smith told the BBC that the Brexit negotiations have been the "worst example of ill-discipline in cabinet in British political history."

-- David Gauke, Britain's justice secretary, said May has to accept the possibility of backing a customs union if that's the measure Parliament supports this week. The Guardian's Rajeev Syal reports: "This was dismissed by Brexiters, including those in cabinet, who have threatened to resign if May accepts a customs union or submits to a delay that goes beyond 22 May. ... **Concerned by the possibility of cabinet resignations, May is being urged by some ministers to allow a free vote on any customs union proposal.** If parliament backs a customs union, ministers believe May will be forced to make a decision that will lead to resignations when the cabinet meets on Tuesday. …

May’s grip on power looks increasingly fragile, with cabinet ministers openly preparing for a leadership challenge. She appears poised to trigger a general election if parliament fails to agree on a way forward that she would then lead.”

Amy Coney Barrett speaks during the University of Notre Dame's Law School commencement ceremony last year. (Robert Franklin/South Bend Tribune/AP)

ALL THE PRESIDENT’S MEN AND WOMEN:

-- Trump has repeatedly told activists on the right that he's "saving" Judge Amy Coney Barrett of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit so he can appoint her to replace Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg if something happens to her. Trump reportedly said he wants Barrett for the Ginsburg seat as he prepared to pick Brett Kavanaugh to replace Anthony Kennedy last year. Kavanaugh was Kennedy's former clerk, and the retiring justice ostensibly preferred that his seat go to a friend. (Axios)

-- Answering a question on Fox about her marriage, Kellyanne Conway said that her husband, George, "cried on election night in his MAGA hat" and that he withdrew from consideration for a job at the White House, contradicting what Trump has previously said. "He wanted to take a job in the Trump administration and changed his mind, and was a guest of the president and first lady months after he withdrew himself from consideration at the White House," she said. "And when he withdrew his name, he said that he would still support the president and his agenda and, quote, 'his wonderful wife's work.' So if that's changed, I haven't changed.'" (Felicia Sonmez)

-- Mulvaney claimed on ABC that Mueller "intended" for Barr to make the call on whether Trump obstructed justice. "Mulvaney declined to say whether the White House would release the written responses the

president provided to Mueller during the course of the special counsel's investigation, and blamed Mueller's appointment on ‘a small group of people within the law enforcement community,'" per Politico.

-- Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), who is up for reelection in 2020, sent an open letter this morning to Barr urging the Justice Department to stop pushing in the courts for the total destruction of the Affordable Care Act. (Politico)

-- Congress's first subpoena to Barr has nothing to do with Mueller or health care. The House Oversight Committee plans on voting to issue subpoenas to Barr and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross for documents related to the decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census. Politico's Matthew Choi and Quint Forgey report: “Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) is seeking a memo and note that James Uthmeier, of the Commerce Department's office of general counsel, wrote to Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General John Gore about the controversial query in fall 2017. Cummings is also seeking testimony from Gore."

Virginia Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax (D) presides over the state Senate in Richmond on Feb. 22. (Steve Helber/AP)

A COMMONWEALTH DIVIDED:

-- Virginia's executive branch remains in a strange state of stasis as all three men in charge begin to step out of the national scrutiny that came with a month of scandals in February. Gregory S. Schneider and Laura Vozzella report: "Gov. Ralph Northam (D) has begun doing something normal for most politicians but

risky for him: appearing in public and taking questions from reporters. … Northam dismissed his outside crisis management team when its two-week contract expired. And, with increasing confidence, he has begun exercising the power of his office. … Northam isn't going away … And neither is Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax (D), who denies two separate allegations of sexual assault, nor Attorney General Mark R. Herring (D), who admitted wearing blackface during his college days."

-- But the state — and the nation — is being reminded of the accusations against Fairfax by CBS, which is airing interviews today and tomorrow that Gayle King conducted with Fairfax's two accusers.

-- Fairfax's office said the lieutenant governor passed two polygraph tests that show he was truthful about the sexual assault allegations. Donna St. George reports: "The tests were administered Friday by a retired FBI polygraph expert and showed Fairfax (D) answered truthfully in denying he engaged in nonconsensual sexual activity with each of his accusers, said Barry Pollack, an attorney for Fairfax. … Fairfax has publicly called for an investigation of the allegations by law enforcement, though he has not received an indication that one is underway, said Lauren Burke, a spokeswoman. He took the polygraph tests as a way to clear his name and reputation, she said. … In one test, Fairfax was asked whether [accuser Vanessa] Tyson was 'crying at any time

while she was in your hotel room,' Fairfax said 'no,' and that was found to be truthful, Pollack said, adding that Tyson has stated she was crying and shaken while she was with Fairfax in the hotel room."

SOCIAL MEDIA SPEED READ:

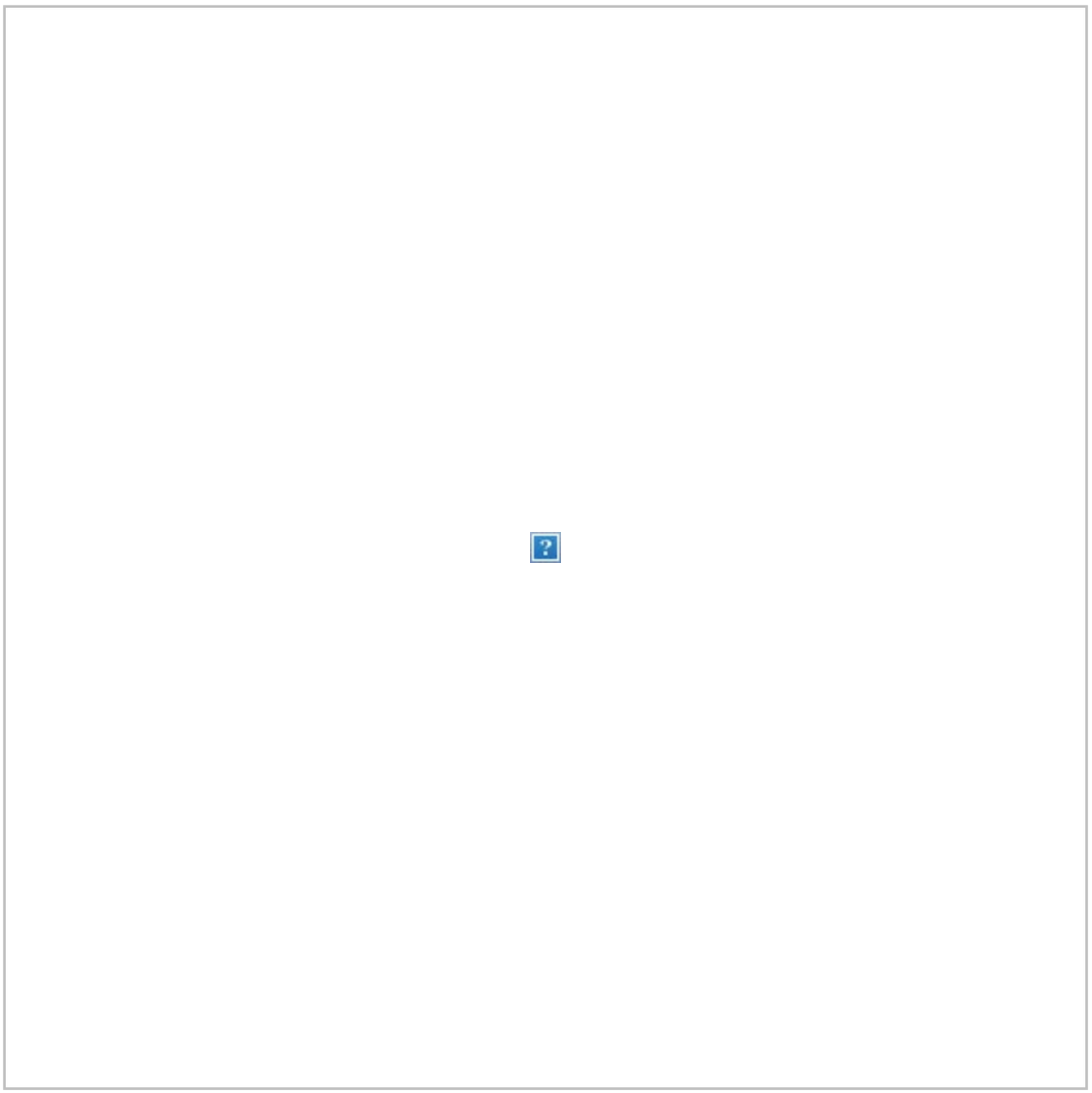
Fox News had a major geographic mishap during a Sunday morning show:

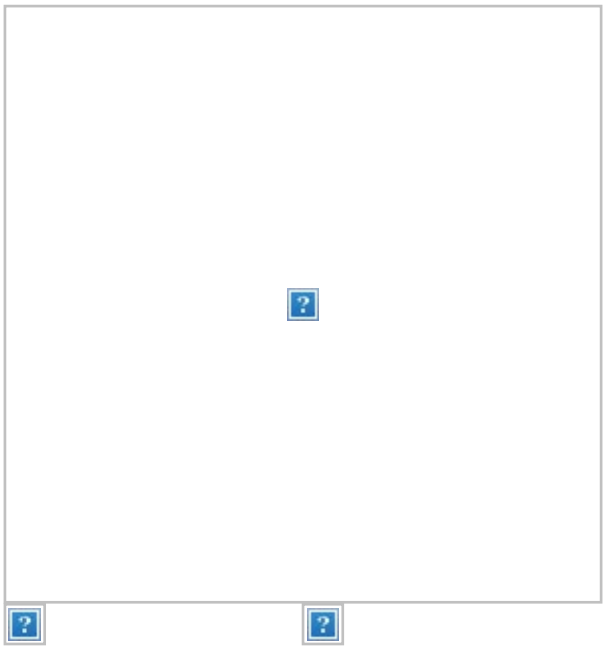
The network later apologized, saying the chyron “never should have happened.” (Herman Wong)

Twitter users were quick to admonish — or make fun of — the network:

This comedian was trying to make travel arrangements:

From an Atlantic writer:





And from 2020 Democratic contender Pete Buttigieg:

Speaking of Buttigieg, a New York Times reporter shared an essay Buttigieg wrote as a high schooler on fellow 2020 contender Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.):

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) rallied her followers against a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee policy that would favor incumbent House members over challengers:

A DCCC spokesman defended the policy, saying Chairman Cheri Bustos (D-Ill.) wants to protect the most diverse Democratic House caucus in congressional history. (Paige Winfield Cunningham)

Conservative writer Denise McAllister — who went viral last week for a Twitter dispute with Meghan McCain that later became a meme — was dropped by an outlet after attacking a gay journalist online:

In a number of now-deleted tweets, McAllister criticized journalist Yashar Ali and implied that his sexuality was attributable to the fact that he was “lost” and “doesn’t know his purpose as a man.” (Kayla Epstein)

The Daily Mail's political editor shared this message from the Trump campaign:

And an AP reporter noted that Trump wasn't the only celebrity visiting Mar-a-Lago this weekend:

GOOD READS:

-- "An overdose and a mother's search for truth," by Eli Saslow: "She had spent the past 13 months retelling the story of her daughter to anyone who would listen, and now Susan Stevens, 53, sped down the highway, needing to tell it again. ... [Stevens] had talked about addiction to the paramedics who tried to revive Toria, to the drug dealers who sold her heroin, to the doctors who failed to help her, and to every elected official who

answered her phone call ... Until last month she was seated next to Trump in the Oval Office as they talked about how 90 percent of drugs entering the United States come across the southern border. ‘We have new angel moms,’ Trump announced, at a news conference minutes later, gesturing to Susan as he declared a national emergency to fund a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. ... 'It’s clear my daughter died because of these drugs coming through our border,' Susan said afterward."

-- “The keeper of the secret,” by Stephanie McCrummen: “It was cold and snowing, but John Johnson had an appointment to keep. He wasn’t going to let the weather stop him, or the worsening cough he’d been ignoring the past week. He put on his black fedora and drove across town to see a friend. 'John, come on in,' she said, and after they settled at her dining room table, she handed him a piece of paper with the names of 12 people, all of them long dead. He squinted at them through his glasses. ... 'One, two, three, four, five, six — six of these names I’ve heard of, Bev,' John said, putting marks next to each one. 'The rest I haven’t.' For 30 years, he had been collecting every detail he could about the August 1926 lynching of a black man named Raymond Byrd by a white mob in Wytheville. The lynching was ... intended to terrorize black populations and reinforce white supremacy and whose perpetrators — while known to locals — were almost never convicted or even named, a tradition of secrecy that carried on in Wytheville. What

John wanted was to unearth them."

-- New York Times, "Michael Avenatti's Biggest Case Yet: His Own," by Rebecca R. Ruiz, Nellie Bowles and Kevin Draper: "Mr. Avenatti, the lawyer who represented the pornographic film actress Stormy Daniels in her lawsuits against President Trump, walked into a cellphone store last Monday night and used the landline to call a reporter for The New York Times, beginning a campaign to deny all allegations against him and defend himself in the court of public opinion. 'I'm the most well-known attorney in the United States right now, for better or worse,' he said on Thursday in an interview. 'And that's been true for a long time now. For a year.'"

HOT ON THE LEFT

Trump is a big cheat at golf, celebrities and athletes told former Sports Illustrated columnist Rick Reilly, who has also played with the president. The New York Post's Gavin Newsham reports: "In his new book,

HOT ON THE RIGHT

A Colorado sheriff would rather go to jail than enforce a gun bill that's making its way through the state's legislature. CNN's Scott McLean and Sara Weisfeldt report: "Weld County Sheriff Steve Reams ... is

'Commander in Cheat: How Golf Explains Trump,' Reilly shares stories from golfers like Tiger Woods and Samuel L. Jackson who've seen Trump play against the rules. In layman's terms, the lower the handicap, the better the player. Jack Nicklaus, winner of a record 18 major golf titles and generally considered the greatest golfer in the history of the game, has a handicap of 3.4. Nicklaus' handicap is listed on the same Golf Handicap and Information Network website used by Trump, where players post their scores. 'If Trump is a 2.8,' writes Reilly, 'Queen

willing to go to jail rather than enforce it. 'It's a matter of doing what's right,' he said. He's not the only one who feels so strongly. The controversial 'red flag' bill aims to seize guns temporarily from people who are deemed to be a threat to themselves or others. ... Colorado's state Senate passed the bill Thursday by a single vote, without any Republican support, and the bill is expected to pass the House, possibly this week. With Democratic majorities in both chambers, state Republicans have too few votes to stand in the way. But more than half of Colorado's 64

Elizabeth is a pole vaulter.' Quite why Trump cheats is another matter. Reilly offers a simple reply. 'Golf,' he writes, 'is like bicycle shorts. It reveals a lot about a man.'"

counties officially oppose the bill. Many have even declared themselves Second Amendment 'sanctuary' counties in protest."

DAYBOOK:

-- Trump will meet with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and have lunch with Vice President Pence before participating in a celebration of the 2019 Prison Reform Summit and First Step Act.

-- Pence will speak at the BakerHostetler Legislative Dinner at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

-- Six Democratic presidential candidates will take questions today during a "We the People" summit in D.C. The seven-hour cattle call at the Warner Theatre from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. is sponsored by the Center for Popular Democracy Action, Communications

Workers of America, Planned Parenthood Action Fund, Service Employees International Union, 32BJ SEIU and the Sierra Club. Speakers include Beto O'Rourke, Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker, Amy Klobuchar, Julián Castro, Kirsten Gillibrand and Jay Inslee. The candidates will be pressed to make commitments related to what organizers call “democracy reform,” from voting rights to the Supreme Court and corporate money in campaigns. The concept is that liberals can't achieve any of the things these groups are fighting for — like stronger unions, better health care and climate change solutions — until it’s easier for people to vote, there’s less partisan gerrymandering and corporate power is reduced. They had some success on this front in 2018: Florida voted to restore the right to vote for 1.4 million ex-offenders, Michigan voted to create an independent redistricting commission, and Nevada passed automatic voter registration.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

“The issue here is not whether it’s ethical.” — Acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney brushed off a question from Jake Tapper about whether the Trump campaign's contacts with Russia were appropriate.

NEWS YOU CAN USE IF YOU LIVE IN D.C.:

-- We'll experience a chilly couple of days before the sun picks back up on Wednesday. The Capital Weather Gang forecasts: "We open April and the new workweek with two rather cool days, but then temperatures ascend to normal and above normal levels. A coastal storm Tuesday into Wednesday could graze the region with showers, but the western half of the area, especially, probably stays dry. Most of us are likely to see a rainy day on Friday before what could be a very nice weekend."

-- The cherry blossoms are expected to reach peak bloom this week. Make sure you see them! (Jason Samenow)

-- In their first win of the season, the Nationals beat the Mets 6-5. (Jesse Dougherty)

-- The Wizards beat the Nuggets 95-90. (Candace Buckner)

-- D.C. United beat Orlando 2-1. (Steven Goff)

VIDEOS OF THE DAY:

"Saturday Night Live" referenced how the first details of Mueller's report were conveyed to the public by three different sources:

SNL also wondered whether Russia's relationship with North Korea will change now that the Mueller report is finished:

Fox News's Jeanine Pirro (played by Cecily Strong) made an appearance on “Weekend Update”:

A meteor caught some Floridians by surprise:

And we got the best April Fools' ideas from America's youngest tricksters:

Free April Fools' Day ideas from kids

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